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SUBJECT: RULING PARTY STRIVES TO REGAIN UNITY AT NATIONAL CONGRESS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Facing sharp divisions between senior members of the party, Ghana's ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) took steps at its National Conference to restore unity and incorporate dissident faction into the party leadership. After publicly criticizing President Mills' government, former President Rawlings challenged the party by running his own candidates for party leadership positions. NDC members attempted to strike a compromise, re-electing the party Chairman and General Secretary - who are strong supporters of President Mills and widely viewed as being responsible for the NDC's 2008 electoral success - while voting Rawlings allies (including the former First Lady) into important but subordinate leadership positions. NDC officials expressed satisfaction with the compromise, believing that it will now be difficult for the former President to criticize the government. The party now faces a challenge as it works to merge the competing factions into a cohesive and effective leadership. Mills also signaled his determination to seek re-election in 2012, an attempt to end speculation that he would not seek a second term. End Summary.

¶2. (U) POL Chief and POL FSN attended the NDC's National Delegates' Congress from January 15-17 in the Northern Region capital, Tamale. This was the first major party gathering since the NDC recaptured power in December 2008. Over 2,400 delegates elected national party executives from among 65 aspirants vying for 30 positions. The run-up to the congress was dogged by acrimony and allegations of vote buying, and public criticism of the Mills government by party founder and former President Rawlings and other senior NDC officials.

#### Party Vote Seeks Balance Between Factions

¶3. (SBU) After opening speeches, voting took place for 30 party executive positions. The two most important positions, National Chairman and General Secretary, were won by the incumbents, Kwabena Adjei and Johnson Asiedu Nketia. Adjei and Nketia received well over 90% of the votes, despite their private opposition to Nana Agyemang-Rawlings' candidacy for a vice chairman position and the fact that Nketia's opponent was perceived to have Mrs. Rawlings' support.

¶4. (SBU) For the six vice chairman positions, former First Lady Nana Rawlings was the top vote-winner, with 1,433 out of 1,900 voters. Three other Rawlings loyalists, Ekwow Spio-Garbrah, Alhaji Hudu Yahaya, and Alhaji Saeed Sinare, won vice chairman positions. The remaining two vice-chairman positions were won by Kofi Porturphy and Danny Annan, neither of whom is aligned with the Rawlings faction. ¶5. (U) Yaw Boateng Gyan, an ally of Nketia and Adjei, ran unopposed for the position of National Organizer, while Kofi Adams, Rawlings' Spokesman, was elected as one of two Deputy General Secretaries. The remaining positions that were elected were less significant and did not involve competition between the factions.

#### Party Leaders Urge Party to Re-Unite

¶6. (U) In their opening speeches, party leaders acknowledged internal divisions and called for unity. Vice President Mahama conceded that the NDC had become polarized in its first year in power. Responding to criticisms voiced recently by Rawlings and Parliamentary Majority Leader Bagbin, Mahama underscored the difficult economic conditions faced by the government since assuming power and highlighted NDC achievements, including its initiative to expand agricultural development in Northern Ghana, improved governance, reduced crime, commissioning of infrastructure projects, reduced inflation and increased school enrollment.

¶7. (U) Former President Rawlings was greeted ecstatically by NDC delegates. He reminded delegates of the party's roots, and urged them to support President Mills by electing persons who could reinvigorate the party's promise of a better Ghana. He underscored the need for party harmony. However, Rawlings warned that after surviving the "malice and viciousness" of the New Patriotic Party government, the party must now overcome the vindictiveness of some of the party's own members and leaders. Rawlings said that the government had depleted goodwill and popularity among the public, and argued that the government has yet to fulfill promises made to the electorate, "especially over punishing NPP wrongdoing."

¶8. (U) President Mills thanked Rawlings for his leadership and counsel, but cautioned delegates to avoid mud-slinging that would undermine party cohesiveness and weaken the government. He underscored his commitment to the NDC agenda, and assured delegates of his determination to retain power in 2012.

¶9. (U) Mills condemned those who claim that there are factions within the NDC, and denied that there is a Mills faction. He expressed hope that the NDC would use the congress to heal its divisions. Mills acknowledged problems within his administration, but said that the government would soon overcome these challenges.

#### NDC Hopes Compromise Ends Rawlings Criticism

¶10. (SBU) On the margins of the conference, senior NDC officials expressed relief that the NDC had managed to strike the difficult balance of accommodating Rawlings while maintaining strong support for Mills. First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Edward Doe Adjaho, and Majority Leader Bagbin, told us that the party had to support Nana Rawlings' candidacy to avoid snubbing the former President.

Bagbin noted that by including Rawlings' allies in the party leadership, Rawlings would "no longer be able to openly criticize the NDC." Doe Adjaho told us that "most people at the Presidency do not fully appreciate the dynamics within the NDC - alienating Rawlings or those perceived to be his allies has serious repercussions for the party." They stressed that the party had made a collective decision to elect those perceived to be both pro-Rawlings and pro-Mills as a way to resolve divisions.

¶11. (SBU) At the same time, party leaders confided to us their concern that the new leadership may have some difficulty working together. Many NDC officials that we spoke with criticized Nana Rawlings' decision to contest an executive position as a former First Lady. They questioned whether she would be able to subordinate herself to the party leadership, and noted that she has not proven herself to be a team player. An NDC member of government told POL Chief January 21 that NDC internal discussions are often heated, and asked whether she would be able to participate in such discussions without taking personal offense.

COMMENT

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¶12. (SBU) One year after taking office, NDC leaders acknowledge sharp divisions between the government and Rawlings, and believe the party will have little chance to retain power in 2012 if it cannot overcome its differences (NOTE: the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) faces similar divisions. END NOTE.) By retaining Adjei and Nketia in the two most important party executive positions, NDC delegates chose to retain two widely respected leaders who are also felt to have played a major role in leading the NDC to victory in ¶2008.

¶13. (SBU) The NDC also made a collective decision to endorse Rawlings' allies - most notably the former First Lady - for key subordinate positions within the party executive. This reflects a concerted strategy to force the factions to work together, and their belief that it will now be difficult for Rawlings to criticize the party leadership. However, maintaining cordiality and cohesion within this new team will clearly present a challenge for the NDC as it seeks to support President Mills' agenda and present a unified message to the public. End Comment.

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